



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 085 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 2, 2013

—
Chair

Mr. Pat Martin

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, May 2, 2013

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP)): Ladies and gentlemen, we'll convene our meeting.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, as we continue our examination of the main estimates. We apologize for the delay. The votes in the House of Commons prevented us from opening right at 11 o'clock as we had hoped.

In our examination of the main estimates, we have invited the Public Service Commission of Canada. Welcome, Madam Robinson, and also the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, Mr. Mario Dion. Welcome, Mr. Dion.

Because of the truncated time, we're going to ask both of you to give your opening remarks, and we should have time for one full round of questioning from the committee members. We need to reserve a bit of time at the end of the meeting for some planning business. We're good until 11:45.

We invite Ms. Robinson, please, to begin with your opening remarks.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson (President, Public Service Commission of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm accompanied today by Hélène Laurendeau, senior vice-president of policy; Gerry Thom, vice-president of staffing and assessment services; and Gisèle Côté, director general, finance and administration.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to meet with you today to discuss our main estimates and our report on plans and priorities for 2013-14. The PSC is responsible for promoting and safeguarding merit-based appointments that are free from political influence, and in collaboration with other stakeholders, for protecting the non-partisan nature of the public service. We report independently to Parliament on our mandate. We also administer programs on behalf of departments and agencies that recruit qualified Canadians from across the country.

Under the delegated staffing system set out in the Public Service Employment Act, the PSC fulfills its mandate by providing policy guidance and expertise, conducting effective oversight, and delivering innovative staffing and assessment services. In our main estimates for 2013-14, the PSC is authorized to spend \$89.9 million, and in addition, it has the authority to recover up to \$14 million of

the cost of our counselling and assessment services and products provided to federal organizations.

As a result of the spending review of 2012, our budget is being reduced by \$8.9 million, to be implemented over three years. Last year, our reductions were \$2.2 million, with another \$2.2 million to be reduced this year, and \$4.5 million to be reduced next year.

Of the 88 positions that were to be eliminated, 38 were achieved through vacancy management and attrition. Of the 50 employees affected, 27 have been placed in other positions, 18 have opted to leave the public service with the assistance of transitional support measures and education allowances, and we are still working on the placement of the other five employees. As a result of these reductions, in 2014-15, the PSC will have the equivalent of 874 employees, as compared to 922 for this year.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, during the past year, the Public Service Commission devoted considerable attention and effort to provide policy guidance and supporting tools to departments and agencies as they implement workforce adjustment. We will continue to provide this support, in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Canada School of Public Service as well as other stakeholders.

Today, the staffing system is adapting to a changing environment, most notably, a smaller public service and a reduced level of staffing activity. In 2011-2012, just prior to Budget 2012, we found that the number of employees who come under the Public Service Employment Act had fallen by 2.4%. We also reported that overall hiring to the public service had fallen by 10.3%, although student hiring has declined the least. We are now reviewing the data for the past fiscal year and we will be providing a full assessment in our 2012-2013 annual report, to be tabled this fall. We look forward to discussing those results with your committee.

Now, I would like to turn to our strategic priorities for this year.

[English]

Our first priority is to provide ongoing independent assurance to Parliament in relation to the performance of the staffing system under the Public Service Employment Act. In doing so, we continue to focus on and further improve our core activities. We have had seven years of experience in implementing our responsibilities under the revised Public Service Employment Act.

Our outreach and interaction, along with our monitoring, audits, investigations, and studies—all of these activities provide opportunities for us to examine lessons learned and to identify areas for improvement and to take concrete action. We now have a unique opportunity to take advantage of our expertise to improve our processes, with the goal of developing a more efficient and integrated approach to our oversight and delivery functions.

We will continue to adapt our oversight activities, policies, and services, in line with a maturing staffing system, and to meet the evolving needs of departments and agencies. We will continue to work closely and collaboratively with organizations to help them build a stronger culture of prevention and compliance, while we continue to deliver on our fundamental responsibility to provide independent oversight and assurance to Parliament.

● (1140)

[Translation]

Our second priority is to continue to enhance the priority administration program, which allows the public service to redeploy skilled and experienced employees. The implementation of workforce adjustment has resulted in an increased number of surplus employees and laid-off individuals who are eligible to be appointed ahead of all others to vacant positions in the public service, provided they meet the essential qualifications of the positions.

We have made policy, program and service improvements to provide greater access, fairness and transparency, with the objective of placing as many priority persons as quickly as possible.

[English]

Mr. Chair, there are currently about 2,900 priority persons, an increase of 60% since last April when 1,800 persons had priority rights. Since April 2012, 956 priority persons have been redeployed into new positions. Most of them, around 70%, were employees affected by workforce adjustment.

At the same time, we've also seen a drop in the placement of other priority persons, including a significant decline in the placement of Canadian veterans who have been medically released. We have been monitoring the situation very closely, along with Veterans Affairs, which has overall responsibility for policy and programs for Canada's veterans. At its request, the PSC provided technical advice regarding this priority entitlement to Veterans Affairs for its consideration. We are ready to support the implementation of any additional measures.

[Translation]

Our third priority is to work with stakeholders to foster increased awareness regarding political activities and to help public servants better understand their legal rights and responsibilities under the PSEA. We will continue to collaborate with organizations, communicate regularly and improve our tools. We must increase awareness of non-partisanship as a core value of the public service.

We have recently launched a revised self-assessment tool, to help public servants make informed decisions about engaging in a political activity. Employees will be able to better assess whether their participation in a political activity could impair, or be perceived as impairing, their ability to perform their duties in a politically

impartial manner. This comprehensive tool provides public servants with a detailed assessment including a more realistic rating with respect to their participation in certain political activities. The revised tool was launched as a one-year pilot and we will use this experience to identify further improvements.

[English]

I would like now to turn to our responsibilities under the Employment Equity Act. The PSC is responsible for identifying and eliminating barriers in recruitment and staffing, and for developing policies and practices that promote a more representative public service. Overall we found that members of three of the four designated employment equity groups continue to apply and be appointed to the public service at proportions exceeding their respective workforce availability. The exception is for the recruitment of persons with disabilities who continue to be under-represented in terms of applications and appointments.

To continue our work, we are conducting a study on the rate of promotions from the employment equity perspective and on how members of the designated groups perceive the appointment process. We are nearing completion of this study, and its findings will be published in our annual report in the fall. This should help inform future discussions in this area.

We also have important responsibilities to support official languages. Our staffing policies clearly stipulate that all communications with candidates in appointment processes must be done in the official language of their choice. In our oversight we also verify that individuals meet the official language requirements for public service jobs. We are also responsible for developing language tests to assess second language proficiency against the standards set out by Treasury Board. These tests ensure that the second language requirements for bilingual positions are assessed fairly and consistently.

[Translation]

The PSC is committed to enabling departments and agencies in building a workforce to meet the current and future needs of the public service.

We will continue to foster strong relationships with all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, departments and agencies as well as bargaining agents, so that Canadians will continue to benefit from a professional and non-partisan public service.

● (1145)

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Chair. My colleagues and I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Robinson. I'm sure there will be questions from committee members, but first we will hear from the public sector integrity commissioner, Monsieur Mario Dion.

You have the floor, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Dion (Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I am very pleased to be here on your invitation to discuss our main estimates for 2013-14 as well as our recent achievements. I am accompanied by our Executive Director, Ms. France Duquette.

You may recall that my first involvement with the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner dates back almost two and a half years ago, first as Interim Commissioner and then as Commissioner on a seven-year appointment approved in Parliament in December 2011. The office was created in April 2007 as part of the Accountability Act and I am only the second person to hold this position.

Our dual role under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act is to receive and deal with disclosures of wrongdoing allegedly taking place within the federal public sector and to handle complaints of reprisals sustained as a result of having made a protected disclosure. While public servants may blow the whistle within their own organization, they often come to us as we are independent. However, we are the only ones responsible to investigate allegations of reprisals.

[English]

The number of disclosures made to my office has doubled in the last three fiscal years, and I believe that this is attributable to our increased profile, as well as to the growing sense of confidence within the public service—and, hopefully, the public sector at large—as to our professionalism, discretion, and efficiency.

The office currently employs 28 public servants, and we also retain private sector resources from time to time to supplement our expertise. As of now, since the inception of the office, we have received close to 450 disclosures of wrongdoing and over 150 complaints of reprisal. Our current budget is sufficient to meet our workload, but based on intake trends it is quite possible we will one day have to ask for additional resources.

When we receive a disclosure or a complaint of reprisal, my role as commissioner is to first decide whether the case warrants a full-fledged investigation, and after one has been launched and concluded, whether on the balance of probabilities a wrongdoing has been committed, or in the case of an allegation of reprisal, whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that reprisal action has taken place.

In the last 13 months, we have tabled five cases before Parliament following a finding of wrongdoing involving staff at HRSDC, the Laurentian Pilotage Authority, CIDA, CBSA, as well as the former chair of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. We have also referred three cases of reprisals to the special tribunal created by our governing legislation. As of March 31, 2013, we were actively investigating 22 allegations of wrongdoing and seven complaints of

reprisals, and I aim to complete all of these investigations by the end of the year.

Since my appointment, we have focused on recruiting a sufficient number of competent employees to fulfill our mandate. Our positions are currently staffed with highly skilled individuals, and last year we experienced a perfectly normal rate of attrition. This explains why we were able to complete 38 investigations in 2012-13, as opposed to a total of 22 in the first five years of the existence of the office.

We have recently adopted formal service standards guaranteeing—barring exceptional circumstances having to do with complexity or scope—that we will make decisions whether to launch an investigation within 90 days and no more than 90 days, and that all investigations will be completed within one year of being launched.

It's important that people who come to us, as well as those against whom allegations are made, find out in a reasonable period of time the outcome of our work. I'm sure you can appreciate that blowing the whistle requires a lot of courage, and that being the subject of an investigation is often a stressful experience; hence, the need to act expeditiously but with rigour.

[Translation]

I am proud to have been chosen as leader of a dedicated group of employees who are committed to the implementation of the will of Parliament and to the contribution of the enhancement of public confidence in the integrity of the public sector. I believe we are starting to demonstrate—in conjunction with senior officials across the system—that the act can work. We are dealing with a complex piece of legislation and often with sensitive situations requiring a lot of skills and attention. I hope you share my sense that things have improved significantly over the last two years, as well as my confidence in the future of the office.

●(1150)

Seven provinces have now adopted similar legislation. This is also a recent trend across many nations in the world. The full potential of whistleblowing regimes will only be achieved over time and after several cultural, legal and organizational obstacles have been resolved.

I look forward to your questions and comments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Dion.

We will begin, then, with the NDP and Mr. Mathieu Ravignat.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

[English]

My first question is for the commissioner.

It would have been no doubt useful to you, with regard to your budget, to know how your law may or may not change in the future. It's been more than a year since the government was supposed to take a look at the law dealing with whistle-blowers.

I wonder if you have a confirmation now that the law will indeed be reviewed?

Mr. Mario Dion: I have received no indication from the President of the Treasury Board that the law will be reviewed in the current fiscal year. We therefore operate on the assumption that we have the statute we have until a review takes place. We'll have to adapt when it does take place.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Thank you for that very clear answer.

In addition, you have taken upon yourself to make certain backroom operational savings. One could argue that of all the things and all the budgets that should be maintained, a budget dealing with the transparency and accountability of the public service is something that should be maintained. Your resources in the grand scheme of things are pretty minor compared with those of other commissioners or other departments in the public service.

Has this request to lower your expenses put into question your ability to treat cases of wrongdoing in the public service?

Mr. Mario Dion: As I pointed out during my opening remarks, we currently have enough resources. We did contribute a 5% reduction. It will kick in during 2014-15 and it will amount to \$286,000. But there is still flexibility. We are able to cope with the caseload as it exists today. We have no control over the quantity or the quality of what comes our way. We receive disclosures, we receive complaints, but at the present time I am very confident that we will be able to cope in 2014-15, even with a slight reduction of 5%.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: If you had more resources accessible to you, could you deal with more cases?

Mr. Mario Dion: We could probably do things in a slightly more timely fashion if we had more resources, obviously.

It's the availability of what I call knowledge workers. If you have more knowledge workers, it will take less time to produce an equally high-quality product. But we have adopted new standards—no more than 90 days to decide whether to investigate, and no more than one year once we launch an investigation. I'm confident we will meet those standards with existing resources. If Parliament wanted us to change that to six months, then of course I would need additional resources to conduct within six months as opposed to one year. But we have enough at this point.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: My next question is for Ms. Robinson.

In your report on plans and priorities, the table entitled "Human Resources (Full-time Equivalents)" says 874 for 2014-15 and 871 for 2015-16. So there is a drop.

Could you tell me what types of jobs we are talking about exactly? Have those people been laid off or are they retiring? What level will be affected? Will managers be affected or not?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much for your questions.

First, as we decided to change the way we implement our deficit reduction plans, right at the outset, we decided to continue to inform Parliament as we have always done and to support the department in

implementing the delegated staffing system. We also want to make sure that we are able to provide adequate oversight.

Finally, in terms of the eliminated positions, we are going to close two regional offices in Edmonton and Winnipeg. The closures will take place in April 2014. Those offices provide internal services to the government, and services to the public will not be compromised in any way. We also chose the offices that had the lowest service demand in our regions.

• (1155)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Will you be eliminating executive and managerial positions?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I do not have the breakdown with me on the number of officials and managers. I could forward the information to the committee. This number includes both.

To answer your question about the 50 people affected, I can tell you that 27 people were connected with jobs for which they are qualified and 18 others decided to leave the public service and take the severance pay. We have five employees left and we are working very closely with them to find them other jobs.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ravignat.

Thank you, Madam Robinson.

Next, for the Conservatives, is Dan Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up with the Public Service Commission on some of the same themes as my colleague.

According to the 2013-14 main estimates, the PSC's main estimates include a decrease of \$4.5 million resulting from savings identified as part of the budget 2012 spending review. In which areas and under which specific program activities were reductions achieved or planned?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

We reduced across most of the program areas. I'll go to the RPP itself, because I have it by branch, and I'll do it by program activity architecture.

On staffing integrity and political impartiality, we reduced the management structure of our policy branch. We reduced and streamlined our research resources. We streamlined our legal service. Also, we closed our library and will use library services from other organizations in Ottawa. In our staffing and assessment services, there we reduced in the range of \$5 million over the period of three years. I just mentioned the closure of our two regional offices. We also streamlined our staffing advisory services.

On oversight of integrity in staffing and non-partisanship, this was the area that was reduced the least. Those are our core oversight functions in the area of investigations and audits. There we preserved our capacity to investigate and to audit; rather, we reduced on our data side by amalgamating two surveys. We have a survey of managers and a survey of employees that we do annually. By fusing those into one survey, we're able to save resources.

Mr. Dan Albas: It seems to me that the reductions that either have gone into effect or are planned are non-core mandate functions and are being done through efficiencies, by outsourcing the library service, and in regard to the survey, by combining. Is that correct?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: That's correct. We amalgamated two surveys rather than outsource.

I should also add, if I have a minute, that we also did a corresponding decrease in our internal services functions, because we have a smaller organization to support.

Mr. Dan Albas: What proportion of the decrease will be attributed to a reduced number of full-time equivalents? I know that you mentioned specific numbers for particular closures, but can you just put that in an overall number?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Sure. The reduction of \$9 million, or \$8.99 million, results in a decrease of 88 full-time positions. Thirty-eight of those were achieved through attrition. That left 50 persons who were affected. Twenty-seven of those were placed within the public service. The rest either left voluntarily...and there are five that we're still looking to place.

My colleague is just giving me the answer to a previously asked question. Of those persons affected, nine of them were executives.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay, so it's nine out of the total. Those are managerial positions, then?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Yes, that's correct. Those would be executive positions: EX-1, EX-2, and above.

• (1200)

Mr. Dan Albas: It seems to me that it was really on non-core activities, and you took a particular interest in making sure that you had resources for the areas that you were particularly responsible for. Is that correct?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: That is correct.

Mr. Dan Albas: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Ninety seconds.

Mr. Dan Albas: Under plans and priorities, you state, "Demand for certain staffing and assessment services is declining as the public service gets smaller and departments become more self-reliant, with stronger staffing systems and enhanced human resources...capacity."

How have you managed through the recent federal public service downsizing? Do you have enough resources to administer the increased number of surplus employees?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you for the question.

So yes, as you observe in the first part of your question, the rate of staffing overall in government is declining, and departments over the last seven years, since the new act was put into place, have been continually increasing their own departmental capacity. Those two

things in combination have resulted in a decline in demand for our staffing services, which are based on cost recovery.

That did allow us some flexibility. It does still present some budget challenges for us, I should say, because you lose the revenue.

Having said that, we were able to deploy some of those persons to work on the priority administration program. Right now, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, with the number of persons laid off or declared surplus, there is a great demand for the priority system, which is the system that we use. It's a centrally managed system, and persons in that system have a right to be redeployed to jobs for which they are qualified.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

The Chair: You're right on time there, Dan. Thank you.

Next is Mr. Denis Blanchette for the NDP.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our guests.

Ms. Robinson, let's pursue the same topic. We are in the process of paring down our public service, which changes your role in a way. Although you will be less busy recruiting, you will have to transfer or train many people.

Could you tell us what the impact of these new demands is on your organization? More people need your services. You must advise organizations that may be having a hard time fulfilling their duties because they are losing people. You are also losing staff members and part of your budget. How do you work in this climate? What type of pressure is your organization currently experiencing in order to fulfill its mandate?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much for your questions.

We started planning for changes two years ago. We started a process to reallocate our budgets and our staff to make sure we had everything we needed for the system to work during the downsizing process and to support the workforce adjustment policy.

As a result, we had to reallocate some of our resources. In fact, we invested \$2 million from the policy side to ensure the priority system is working well. It isn't easy, but we are still carrying on with the process.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Precisely, the process of setting priorities must be exerting a great deal of pressure on your organization. Many more people needed to be reshuffled in the public service. A lot of people decided to leave because they were no longer able to work in that climate. You must be feeling the pressure and it must take longer to process redeployment cases.

What is actually happening in your organization? How do you manage to keep your head above water?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much for the question.

We have made some changes to the priority system. Overall, the system is working better than before. That is helping the situation and slightly taking the pressure off our resources.

I will ask Ms. Laurendeau to give you a brief overview of the changes that have been made to help with those activities.

• (1205)

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau (Senior Vice-President, Policy Branch, Public Service Commission of Canada): As Ms. Robinson said, we made changes to the priority system in January 2012. We made a series of technological updates to the system to improve the processing of files, the placement and the assessment of people who should be placed as priority persons.

We have increased our capacity with several series of automated sessions. For instance, in January 2012, we allowed our employees to directly obtain a notice instead of doing things manually. In June 2012, we also added the option for the system to send the assessment results directly to priority persons. That is another activity that had to be done manually in the past.

In November, we launched a portal enabling the priority persons to update their resumé themselves and to monitor the available jobs. In the next few months, we are planning to add a sort of granularity for mobility codes. In other words, people will be able to better code the types of jobs they would be available and qualified for.

With the automated system, we managed to keep a certain level for standard services. Clearly, a number of services are still provided by people, but the system allows us to be much more effective.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: You may have increased your efficiency, but priority requests have piled up on your desks. I am sure you must keep statistics about the time you need to reassign people. Has that increased a lot?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Placing people takes more or less the same time. We reassigned 956 people last year, for a total of about 2,900. We continue to act as the requests come in, given that we must also always have positions available so that we can place people. Our efficiency rate in placing people has not decreased.

We also worked very hard in partnership with the departments to make sure that they understood their obligations in terms of increasing the efficiency of the system.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: That concludes your time, Denis. Thank you.

Next for the Conservatives, Mr. Jacques Gourde.

[Translation]

Mr. Gourde, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for being here.

My question goes to Mr. Dion.

The commissioner's office has been in existence since 2007. Have you worked there since 2007?

Mr. Mario Dion: No, I started right at the beginning of 2010. Before that, I had no links with the office at all.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Okay.

After the six years that the commissioner's office has been in existence, do you have proposals or advice for members of the public service or the general public who may be aware of wrongdoings or irregularities and who may wish to make you aware of the them? What would be the procedure?

If you have suggestions, we would like to hear them.

Mr. Mario Dion: At the moment, there are 375,000 public servants at the federal level. We try to reach them through our website. That is our vehicle of choice because it is everywhere and it does not cost very much. We also try to reach them through events, meetings and gatherings, which can sometimes bring together hundreds, if not one or two thousand public sector employees. We go with our kiosk, our brochures, and so on.

Next year, we are also going to try to provide online access to anyone who wants to get information on a possible disclosure or who wants to make one. We have to make it easier to do. We have a toll-free number and a whole range of ways to get in touch with us. We have the ability to respond to the calls that we receive in 24 hours at most. I think that we have what we need.

Whistleblowing is very difficult. It takes courage and confidence. Whistleblowing is risky. In the public-sector culture, it is always risky to disclose wrongdoing. People have to be sure that information is going to be treated confidentially and that, to the extent possible, the complaint is going to be looked at quickly.

The commissioner's office is committed to ensuring confidentiality and to dealing with complaints as quickly as possible, professionally, and with a high level of service. This is an act of faith. There will be more and more situations in which whistleblowers will be able to see that we have been up to the task.

For example, the last report that we submitted two weeks ago involved people in a very difficult situation at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. They saw that they could trust us. The Public Service Alliance of Canada also stated that the very difficult situation at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal had been dealt with appropriately throughout.

I think that word of mouth and the passage of time are going to help us a lot in winning the trust we need.

•(1210)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Are there things that can be done to protect people who are afraid and who would like to take action? You mentioned confidentiality. Can you offer more than that?

Mr. Mario Dion: Yes. The main thrust of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act is to provide that protection. If someone makes a disclosure and, as a result, he suffers reprisals, he is protected.

First, committing acts of reprisal against someone for making a disclosure is a criminal act. Section 42 of the act provides for serious penalties for anyone doing so.

Secondly, under the act, a special tribunal is established that may order the reinstatement of an employee who has been dismissed because of a disclosure and to provide financial compensation or punitive damages. The act guarantees that protection. We must make that known and we must make it work.

That is why I have sent three cases to the tribunal and it is why we are conducting seven investigations into reprisals. There will probably be a referral to the tribunal for sanctions to be imposed.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much, sir.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Jacques.

Thank you, Monsieur Dion.

Next, for the Liberals, is John McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you.

Mr. Dion, how do you know that the doubling of your number of cases is due to greater awareness of your office rather than simply more wrongdoing?

Mr. Mario Dion: I'm not a statistician. I'm just a lawyer. There are 375,000 public servants in the federal public sector. The number of disclosures last year was 113. This is a very small number compared to the size of the federal public sector: 365 days a year, 24-7, 113 disclosures. I think we could have much more than that.

It is increasing. The only factor I can think of is that more people are becoming aware of this avenue and they're using it. The potential is much greater, in my view, just mathematically speaking. The definition of wrongdoing is very vast as well, in section 8 of the act. I'm sure there are thousands of wrongdoings that could be disclosed.

Hon. John McCallum: One thing puzzled me. In your opening remarks I got the impression that you were pretty well going to solve all the cases that were brought to you. When I read your plans and priorities, you say that your target is only 60%, in terms of the number of cases resolved as a percentage of the number of investigations. That suggests you'll only resolve 60% of your cases.

Mr. Mario Dion: No. We're talking about the timeliness with which we resolve them. At that point in time we had created an objective of resolving 60% within a set period of time.

We actually mean within the time targets. The document is not clear. Of course, every case that comes to us will be dealt with. In the case of a disclosure of wrongdoing, the final outcome is that either

we determine there was no wrongdoing and we close the file, or we determine there was wrongdoing and we file a case report in Parliament.

Every case, all 113 cases that were filed, either will be closed because there is no evidence of wrongdoing or will be the subject of a case report to Parliament.

Hon. John McCallum: Only 60% of them will be....

Mr. Mario Dion: They will be done within the timeframe that we had set for that fiscal year.

Hon. John McCallum: That suggests you have a problem, because your expenditure levels are going down and your cases have doubled. That means 40% of them won't be resolved in the appropriate time period.

Mr. Mario Dion: Mr. Chair, I'm aware that I'm talking to an economist, who has a distinct advantage. I'm just a lawyer. I went into law because of mathematics.

When I started two-and-a-half years ago, there were 14 employees in the office. We now have 28. There has been a gradual process. We've doubled the workforce. We've recruited competent people to do the work within the same initial budget that was available. That's why I'm so confident that at this stage, this morning, I'm able to say we will dispose of cases in no more than one year when we investigate.

•(1215)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

Turning to Ms. Robinson, the government has said that cuts would be 70% back office. Have you achieved that objective?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: In terms of our own organization, much of what the Public Service Commission does is internal to government. We of course have our oversight activities where we work with internal departments to audit and to conduct investigations in staffing activities. It depends, I guess, on how you categorize that. Of course, we do that as well as an activity to report to Parliament on the assurance of the system. We also provide staffing services to departments, which are internal services. If you put those in the category of internal to government, that's where all of the reductions took place.

We do provide some services to Canadians, of course, through our job portal. When Canadians want to apply for a job in the federal public service, they use our electronic recruitment system. None of that has been changed.

Hon. John McCallum: In all our conversations with Treasury Board, we've been unable to get a definition of what exactly the back office costs are. You represent the Public Service Commission, so maybe you can give us a definition of exactly what a back office cost is.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: It would not be part of my mandate, I'm afraid, to give the definition. From my experience, I consider back office costs certainly anything in the corporate service area—HR, finance, and those functions. We tend to consider those to be back office functions. Within each program, sometimes there are administrative functions that can be part of the back office. I tend to categorize them as administrative functions.

Much of what we do at the commission is internal to government to support and serve the staffing system.

Hon. John McCallum: Your report also says that the priority administration program is a significant pressure on resources and also that the shift in demand from certain services is putting pressure on the commission's capacity to reallocate resources in a timely and effective manner.

If you have pressures in these areas and you're reducing your overall costs, what's getting cut?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: The things that are being cut are the things that I mentioned at the beginning. We are closing two regional offices, amalgamating some management structures. We've closed our library and we resized our corporate service function. Having said that, I do acknowledge that we do continue to have some pressure and it is....

What we have is some areas of the commission where the demand has decreased because the volume of staffing services is declining. So the demand for that part of our work is decreasing. What we've done in some cases is that we've redeployed some of those persons to work in the priority admin system because they have similar skills and expertise.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCallum.

Next for the Conservatives, Kelly Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and I too would like to join my colleagues in welcoming you here today.

My first question is for you, Commissioner Dion. In your opening statement you said that when you receive a disclosure or a complaint of reprisal, that it is your role first to decide whether the case warrants a full-fledged investigation or not. I'm wondering if you could explain for us the process or the criteria that you use in determining whether it is a full-fledged investigation that is needed when you receive a complaint.

Mr. Mario Dion: First of all, everything we do in this office—I do and the office does—is governed by the statute, which is a very detailed statute and provides the commissioner with a lot of discussion vis-à-vis how to use those limited resources that are available to make those decisions.

A case comes in typically in writing. It is typically incomplete. So there's an intake officer who basically reviews the content of the disclosure, determines whether additional information is needed in order to properly analyze whether it falls within our statute and gets the additional information, comes to.... There are sections in the act that allow the commissioner to.... First of all, there are sections that say I can not deal with something, for instance, that's currently before a court. That's one example where I have an absolutely mandatory obligation not to investigate.

I have a number of situations where I have to weigh whether it's sufficiently important. So if you have a disclosure involving a very small sum of money, I have to make a decision as to whether it's worth investing in an investigation. Or if something has taken place

a long time ago, that's another factor that the act indicates I should take into account in determining whether to investigate.

There are situations where we very often find ourselves in a situation where another duly established body could deal with it. For instance, if somebody comes to us and discloses an allegation of racial discrimination for instance, the act makes it clear that I may decide to simply indicate to the person to go the Human Rights Commission, which is equipped to handle those complaints.

The same is true of staffing irregularities. We do receive several cases every year in which the central issue is one having to do with staffing. In which case I typically refuse to deal with it and indicate to the person that they should go to the Public Service Commission, which is much better equipped to review staffing matters.

That's how we do it. The commitment is to make this decision in no more than 90 days so that the person actually knows where her complaint or his complaint is going.

• (1220)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: You have about two minutes left, Kelly.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay, great.

My next question is for you, Ms. Robinson.

I'm looking at your report on plans and priorities and note that you talk about three priorities in your opening message. You also talk about your first priority, which is to provide ongoing independent assurance to Parliament in relation to the performance of the staffing system and in doing so, that you will continue to focus on your core activities.

Now you may have explained some of that in your testimony and in answer to other questions, but I'm wondering if you could just provide me with an understanding of what those core activities are.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much.

They generally relate to our oversight of the staffing system. We have an audit program whereby we audit each department on a seven-year cycle, and so we directly examine their staffing files and their systems and controls and procedures around staffing to assure ourselves that they're managing their delegations appropriately.

We also have an investigations function. In a year, we receive in the range of 500 requests for investigations, and complete 100 investigations on average, and again those relate to situations with respect to a staffing transaction. For example, under a fraud investigation, one might find that someone has submitted a false diploma or something like that, just to give you an example.

We also have a reporting function whereby departments are required to report annually to the commission on certain staffing patterns and tendencies within their organization. It's another way that we survey the staffing system and assure ourselves that people are respecting the authority delegated from the commission to departments and agencies.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds. Do you have another question?

No? Thank you very much, Kelly. That concludes our first round of questioning.

I'm interested from the chair's point of view, and perhaps committee members would be interested as well. The Public Service Commission is one of the oldest institutions and agencies in the system, isn't it? It goes back to what, 1920 or 1910?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: It goes back to 1908.

The Chair: Yes. My understanding is that it was created to prevent nepotism and to promote fairness in hiring. But I notice in your report on plans and priorities that you report to the Minister of Heritage. So is this an independence shift? It used to be an independent agency, and it was set up to prevent interference and nepotism and favouritism. Now you don't report to Parliament, you report to a minister, whereas Monsieur Dion is completely independent as an officer of Parliament and reports to Parliament, as I'm sure is vital in the type of business he's in.

Do you know anything about the history? When did it shift happen from being an independent office to essentially a part of government?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I can't give you the full history but I can say that in 2005 when the new act was put in place, I believe the independence of the commission was strengthened in some ways. If I could clarify for the purposes of our reporting to government on the use of our financial authorities through the FAA, yes, I do report through a minister, and I am of course required to follow all the same guidelines from Treasury Board around how we manage our contracting expenses, etc.

But for the purposes of exercising our oversight functions, I do so independently from government. While our report is tabled in Parliament by the Minister of Heritage, he does not directly intervene in that report in any way. It is done independently by the commission. I believe the systems are set up to support the system functioning in that way.

I would go back, again, to when I referred to how some aspects of the commission have been strengthened. Since 2005 the appointment of the president of the commission has been done through the parliamentary process, and I believe that only Parliament can dismiss me, the president of the commission. So I think that made it in some ways like the other agents of Parliament who also have that protection.

So I believe I function independently when it comes to substantively reporting on our oversight activities, and I have not experienced any interference in the time I've been in this office.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you. That's interesting, Ms. Robinson.

For the NDP, we have Linda Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a good foray into what I was about to ask.

Thank you, all of you, for appearing today.

I notice in your reports that one of the key responsibilities of the Public Service Commission is to ensure integrity and non-partisanship in staffing. If you are doing the staffing, and given that the Parliamentary Budget Officer does not report directly to Parliament but through the Public Service Commission, a number of allegations and concerns have been raised about the process of the hiring of the

PBO, and suggestions made that the process may have been politicized.

I'm wondering why the interview panel has not been made public to try to bring some integrity back into that very highly contentious hiring process.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you for the question.

I should clarify that the Public Service Commission is responsible for appointments under the Public Service Employment Act, so that would not include other Governor in Council appointments you mentioned. Any of the other GIC appointments are not governed by the regime of the Public Service Commission, so we are not responsible for the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thanks for that clarification. So these guidelines have not been made applicable to that process.

I also noticed in there that those who have worked for a minister as political staff for a specified period of time have the right to immediately apply for internal positions. It seems like a bit of a contradiction to say it's ensuring there's no partisanship that goes into the civil service. Can you speak to that?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Yes. This was a change that was put in place, I think, in 2008 or 2009. My colleague, Madame Laurendeau, will clarify if I'm incorrect about that. As you said, after someone has worked as ministerial staff for a period of three years, and have ceased to remain a member of the ministerial staff, they are eligible for a period of one year to apply for internal appointments in the public service.

They must come to the commission. What we do is verify the fact that they had worked for three years and that they've ceased to work as part of ministerial staff. I can share with you the numbers. In 2011-12, the PSC received nine requests from former ministerial staff to confirm their eligibility, and of those eight were approved.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay, thanks. My final question is for Mr. Dion.

I'd like to thank you for the briefing that you provided a few months back. It was for members of Parliament and staff and it was very informative. I'd like to commend you for the fact that you made this very important point that enacting a right is of little value unless you actually inform people of the right, then support them in exercising that right. Of course, that applies to the disclosure of wrongdoing.

I'm wondering if you could speak to it, since you mentioned it may well be that the increase in the number of complaints is because people are starting to find out about the right. Is your budget right now, because you have so many cases, sufficient to actually do the outreach that is necessary to inform the large civil service?

Mr. Mario Dion: I believe so, because one of the things we have to guard against as well is that it would not be appropriate, in my view, to actively solicit disclosures either. It has to be done in a very professional way. There are other means of redress available as well in many of the situations involving us.

The approach we've taken of being visible is having a kiosk at events. I've started to tweet two weeks ago. I have my own professional Twitter account in which I'm gathering some followers as we speak. But I cannot write to 375,000 people every week to remind them of the existence of the office. I've also done 32 briefings of executive committees across the public sector last year, and I've had a number of staff meetings as well. The National Capital Commission, for instance, invited me, and the Library of Parliament, of which you were talking about earlier in your question.

We do what we have to do. Of course, if I had a large pot of money I could imagine other ways of reaching people within the federal public sector, but I think what we do now is probably sufficient to generate an increase that can be managed well. It's important not to have 1,000 cases tomorrow morning, because we would not be able to manage that.

Mr. Chairman, I hope I've answered the question.

• (1230)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC)): Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Duncan, your timing is impeccable.

Next we have the Honourable Ron Cannan.

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Good afternoon. We're working together.

Similar to my colleague, I believe that public servants have the right to be protected and to bring notices of wrongdoing and to be protected from peer reprisals.

I guess my first question would be to Mr. Dion. You say in your opening comments that there's a greater sense of confidence, and as Mr. McCallum said, more people coming forward. Maybe you can share what measures you've implemented to provide greater confidence for the public sector, for those who have come forward with their observations of wrongdoing.

Mr. Mario Dion: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chairman, actions speak much louder than words. The best publicity we will ever generate for the effectiveness of the office is the case reports we table in Parliament. Two and a half years ago we had tabled no case reports in Parliament, ever. We have done five in the last 13 months and we have several in the pipeline as we speak. I think actions speak louder than words.

Second, in our daily dealings with the people who come to us, it's important that a professional approach be taken. We have recruited staff who are appropriate for taking that approach. Word of mouth will work.

A third step I've taken is to create an advisory committee, which meets periodically, to demystify. Within the confines of confidentiality there is very little I can say about a case closed, of course. The contents of a case are completely confidential. But three of the major unions within the public sector have joined the advisory committee as well. My hope is that they will better understand our mandate and will do some outreach also on behalf of the office. These are PSAC, PIPS, and APEX, which is not a union—it's the Association of

Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada—but it has been attending each meeting of the advisory committee.

It's to demystify, to have an ongoing communication, and hopefully to become known for what we can do—and also to explain what we cannot do, because there are limits to our mandate as well.

Hon. Ron Cannan: In the private sector, companies always have a little suggestion box and look at rewards. You don't want to have people squealing on each other, but you want to have a workplace that is productive and in which you find efficiencies.

Is there any discussion about compensation, if people notice that there are significant savings to be had, or some wrongdoings? Have you ever had that discussion with the minister or in respect to reform of the act?

Mr. Mario Dion: In fact, Mr. Chairman, there was a discussion several years ago in Parliament. There was a bill tabled, if I'm not mistaken, back in 2005 that included such a provision, but it was not in the form of the final bill as adopted. So there is no reward at this point in time. The policy has not been the subject of any discussion, to my knowledge. I have not been involved in any discussion with anyone about the concept of a reward for making a disclosure since taking over two and a half years ago.

Hon. Ron Cannan: I came here in 2006, so I appreciate that information. I'll have to look into this.

From your perspective, do you feel that you have the tools and sufficient investigative powers to fulfill your mandate?

Mr. Mario Dion: Yes.

Hon. Ron Cannan: From your perspective, do you think the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act is balanced and effective as is, or are there any changes that you recommend?

Mr. Mario Dion: When the review that the act calls for is initiated, I will have a number of proposals to make vis-à-vis improving our reach. For instance, there is a section in the act that clearly says that the commissioner shall not do anything to obtain information outside of the federal public sector. That's a bar, which in practice has been a problem, though only in a few cases. I'm sure there are good reasons for the bar, but the bar is frustrating when it happens. It is absolute. I cannot go beyond the boundaries of the federal public sector. This is one example of an area in which I might make a proposal in the course of the parliamentary review of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act.

A second one, which I'll mention very briefly, is that we have an anomaly as well. In several institutions we have people who are appointed by the Governor in Council. We have no jurisdiction over Governor in Council appointees, except insofar as they are the head of their institutions. We've had one or two instances of a GIC appointee who is governed by our act and another GIC appointee who isn't being involved in the same disclosure involving the same alleged wrongdoing. That's another anomaly that I will raise when the review takes place.

•(1235)

Hon. Ron Cannan: I only have a couple of seconds left. I have one last question, on the limitation period for any public servant who claims to be a victim of reprisal.

They have 60 days. Is that sufficient, from your perspective?

Mr. Mario Dion: It has been sufficient, and I guess my predecessor and I have been quite generous in interpreting a provision that gives the commissioner the power to extend the period, when there are reasons to do so. It's a very vague wording.

I think it's important for the stability of the workplace that it be done as quickly as possible, but the statute is generous enough to allow the commissioner to proceed when there is a good reason to go beyond the 60 days.

Hon. Ron Cannan: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Peter Braid): Thank you, Mr. Cannan.

We now move to Mr. Ravnignat.

You have five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to follow up on some of my colleague's comments, I would argue that many public servants who have been put in a situation in which they are whistle-blowing would disagree that 60 days is sufficient. When talking with the Public Service Alliance of Canada as well, and others within the public service, I find that they have concerns respecting that delay.

It has been six years plus, and in other jurisdictions research shows—for example, in the U.S. and Australia—that about 12% to 23% of public servants observe wrongdoing that they consider serious. We're still at a very low number, and I know that you're making efforts to reach out and to raise awareness and that you need more resources to do so. Perhaps part of the problem is with respect to public servants' level of confidence, given cases in the past, that they will be protected if they indeed decide to bring up wrongdoing. Perhaps that is the issue here.

You don't really have a lot of power to do something. You can refer them to a tribunal, if there are reprisals. Only three cases have been to the tribunal, and to my knowledge no one has ever been sanctioned. Your American counterpart has taken more proactive measures; for example, injunctions against employers to prevent dismissal of whistle-blowers while investigations are under way.

What more can you do? Do you think, first of all, that whistle-blowers are really protected?

What more could you, or the law, be doing to protect them, in your opinion?

Mr. Mario Dion: I think whistle-blowers are adequately protected at this point in time. The tribunal has been set up, and the chair of the tribunal is taking his mandate very seriously. There have been cases resolved. Three have been referred to the tribunal; two have been sectorally resolved through a settlement—discussions between the

parties endorsed by the commissioner and approved by the tribunal, in one instance.

It's too early to conclude that it doesn't work. I think it does work. Of course, we live under the rule of law, so people have rights. The alleged repriser also has rights. So it takes time, when a matter goes to the tribunal.

On a couple of occasions we have communicated with the deputy minister in the department involved, as we have the authority to do under the act, to suggest that the alleged victim be separated from the alleged repriser while this is going on.

So there are tools available, which we have yet to fully exploit.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat: Great. Thank you for that answer. I have something else that I'd like....

You'll be happy to know that I tabled a private member's bill today that proposes to extend your powers, with regard to getting documents that are outside the public service as well as to your ability to investigate those who have left the public service.

Could you speak to what it will allow you to do, if in fact the law is amended in this way?

•(1240)

The Chair: Mr. Dion.

Mr. Mario Dion: First of all, Mr. Chair, I only heard of the honourable member's private member's bill as I was walking into the room, so I haven't seen it.

There have been a few instances in which we were prevented from acting in a case involving a former public servant, so of course, if the bill does what you say it will, it will give us an additional avenue to forcing someone to come and testify in spite of the fact that they have left the public sector.

From a policy point of view, I believe this is important. It's too easy to retire or to accept employment in the private sector to escape a situation, and I for one would certainly welcome an extension of those powers.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat: Great.

My question goes to Ms. Robinson.

Federal institutions were supposed to report on the Public Service Official Languages Exclusion Approval Order, a transition program for the commission, by March 31, 2013 at the latest. Have you noticed any problems in applying this order from the information that was submitted by federal institutions?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you for the question.

As the honourable member mentioned, we now have a degree of flexibility for people who were affected involuntarily and who did not at that time have the necessary language level to be transferred to an available position. We put that flexibility in place.

We are monitoring the situation. I think that Ms. Laurendeau will be able to give you the figures on the number of people who took advantage of the option. She will also be able to explain the oversight that we have put in place to make sure that, in 12 months, everyone was going to fulfill their obligations.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The take-up was not out of line. We had about 200 requests in connection with position changes. We are now compiling the data for the first year in which the order was used. Up to now, our checking shows that we have no major problems. Of course, we will compile the data at the end of the year. It will be part of our annual report.

The provision is in place until 2015. We will make sure that the people who take advantage of it fulfill all the requirements of the position in the year following their reassignment.

To this point, we have not seen any particular problems.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Laurendeau.

Thank you, Mathieu.

Next, for the Conservatives, Bernard Trottier.

If we can, I'd like to get a little bit of time in for the Liberals, who've been waiting patiently as well. That'll conclude things.

Could we say three or four minutes for you, Bernard, and then two minutes for Mr. McCallum?

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): That would be fine, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for being here.

Mr. Dion, I feel that your commission is doing essential work, not only for Parliament, but for the entire public service.

My question deals with your report on plans and priorities. I see a discrepancy between planned expenses and human resources. I see a reduction in costs. They are estimated at \$5.9 million in 2013-14, at \$5.4 million in 2014-15 and again at \$5.4 million in 2015-16. However, the number of full-time equivalents remains at 32.

Can you explain that discrepancy? Why is there no change in the staffing level in your office?

Mr. Mario Dion: Thank you for the question.

If you were to look at previous versions of the report on plans and priorities, you would see 43 and 45, instead of the 32 you are reading now. The figure of 32 is the number of people we are able to pay in coming years. That is the reason. We have reduced our objectives. We looked at the classifications as well. We tend to use better classified positions, but fewer of them, than my predecessor had planned to use. We have 28 employees today. We would have the means to pay 34, if I needed that many. The long-term ceiling is 32.

• (1245)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you.

In your remarks, you said that your office has been in existence since 2007 and that it was created after the passage of the Federal Accountability Act.

What did departments do before your office existed? How were investigations done?

Mr. Mario Dion: Thank you for the question.

An office had existed since 2001 as part of the Treasury Board Secretariat. It dealt with integrity, but it had not been created by an act. That is the first distinction. It had no powers under any legislation. It was simply Treasury Board policy. It was the very first beginnings of what we are doing at the moment, if you will.

The act enshrined and strengthened the power and gave it to us. We have all the powers provided by the Inquiries Act, such as the power to issue subpoenas, for example, if someone refuses to come and see us. Mr. Keyserlingk, who was the person in charge at the Treasury Board Secretariat, did not have that at all.

Something was being done previously, but it was more informal, more administrative, and much less legally based.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Is it equally in force in the departments? Is it informal? Is there a well-defined process? If so, is the present commissioner's office more effective than what existed beforehand?

Mr. Mario Dion: I would say that it is stronger. Maybe it is more effective, because we learn as we go along and we improve the effectiveness. There is no doubt that it is stronger.

[English]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I have a final question for Ms. Robinson.

I want to understand the longer-term trends in your spending. In your report on plans and priorities, I see a very healthy trend, if you're looking at cost reduction—from \$107 million in 2009-10, down to \$106 million in 2011-12, to \$90 million in 2013-14, and all the way down to \$85 million for 2015-16. It's a steady downward trend.

I see a lot of language in your report on plans and priorities that suggests a culture of continual improvement. I see things such as learning from best practices and streamlining certain unnecessary processes.

Could you describe the leadership that's in place? It's a tribute to you and other people who lead your organization. What kinds of things are you doing to constantly look at cost reductions?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much for the question.

I would give the credit for this to my predecessor, Maria Barrados, who, in looking at the use of technology, put in place a number of important tools. For example, we now use unsupervised Internet testing so Canadians can apply for many of the jobs from their homes. That not only improves access for Canadians but also takes us away from an environment where we used to fill gymnasiums full of people doing pen and paper tests.

The other thing I'd like to mention, because it's also very important from a security perspective, is that we've also moved to computer-generated tests for our testing. We are starting with our language testing. We use databanks of questions and the computer will generate unique tests every time, so it increases efficiencies and improves the security of our tests. For example, we have had some problems in the past with some of our language tests being compromised. With this new approach, each time someone takes a test, the test will be unique.

My predecessor put a plan in place several years ago, using those kinds of things, using technology, and it's now coming to fruition.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Bernard.

We have a couple of minutes at the end of the meeting if John McCallum would like to comment.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

Monsieur Dion, I think you said that the target time for an investigation is one year. Is that right?

Mr. Mario Dion: Mr. Chairman, that's correct. It's one year from the launch of the investigation.

Hon. John McCallum: Returning to that 60% number in your report on plans and priorities, I guess that means the target is that 60% of the investigations would be completed within the year.

Mr. Mario Dion: Mr. Chairman, in the next version of this document, we will remodel the manner. The target will be 100% at one year, barring, of course, exceptional circumstances to do with vast complexity or something completely unforeseen at this point.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay, I would have thought that from the point of view of a public servant who blows the whistle, remaining in his or her current job might be rather unpleasant. If it's going to take a year, if after blowing the whistle the person has to stay there a whole year before the investigation is complete, I would think that

length of time would be a significant barrier to complaining. It would seem to me to be much better if you could get the investigation done in three months or six months. That would reduce that major barrier, would it not?

• (1250)

Mr. Mario Dion: Of course it would. Our aim is to complete the investigation as quickly as possible. The one year is a ceiling. It's not an objective, no more than one year. Of course we do complete investigations sometimes within eight weeks, six weeks. The commitment is to never take more than one year. It's not the commitment to an average. It's the commitment in each case to never take more than one year.

Hon. John McCallum: My point is it might be worth having additional resources so you could bring that amount of time down and thereby encourage more people to apply.

Mr. Mario Dion: Mr. Chair, if the government decides to give us more resources, we will, of course, plan to use them well, in conjunction with the objectives of the statute, obviously.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's a good answer, and a good point to close on.

Thank you very much, Monsieur Dion, for your testimony.

Thank you, Ms. Robinson. That's very helpful and very interesting.

We're going to suspend the meeting briefly and go in camera for some planning. Please leave by the back door because of the state visit and protocol going on, and anybody who shouldn't be present for an in camera meeting, please excuse yourself now.

The meeting is suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>